



Statement on the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 11, 2003

United States Mission to the OSCE

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to join others in welcoming Ambassador Beecroft to the Permanent Council. And to say that the United States shares his view that much progress has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we believe that this is in no small part due to the direct result of Ambassador Beecroft's at the OSCE's efforts.

I was impressed with several points in Ambassador Beecroft's remarks, and would like to comment on the significant advances we have seen in education, refugee returns, and defense reform.

The OSCE Mission was charged with bringing about a more modern and unified education system for the most important of Bosnia's resources, its youth. Steps to address the existence of what is known as "two schools under one roof" and to reach agreement on the common core curriculum, as well as passage of the state-level framework on primary and secondary education -- these all represent important progress toward this goal. These steps also demonstrate what is possible when all parties are prepared to discard the divisive politics of the past and to work together.

These are valuable measures insofar as they provide a foundation for further reforms, including integration of students in the classroom. We encourage the Mission to continue to pursue other issues, such as verification of full implementation of instructions and commitments made at entity and canton levels. Integration, framework legislation for universities, and other key goals of education reform are also vital for Bosnia's future.

We are pleased to hear that the return of refugees to Bosnia has moved along at an accelerated pace, aided in part by the high level of property law implementation. And we encourage the collaborative efforts of the region's OSCE Missions, with host governments' input and coordination, in pursuit of sustainable returns for all those who do wish to return to their homes.

On defense reform, we applaud the efforts of the Defense Reform Commission and look forward to hearing its report to the Peace Implementation Council later this month in Sarajevo. We commend the efforts of the OSCE Mission and the Commission on this very important element of the overall reform process for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I would also urge Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the help and support of the OSCE, to use this opportunity to take substantive steps toward integration and follow through on its objective of making itself a credible candidate for the Partnership for Peace.

In closing, I would like again to express our deep appreciation to Ambassador Beecroft and to his staff at the OSCE Mission for their dedicated work, and for the role that OSCE has played, and should continue to play, in assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina on the proper path towards further stability and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Thank you.